New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"With a Silk Thread"

Daily Mirror

April 13, 1950

'With a Silk Thread' Runs On and On and On

By ROBERT COLEMAN

This seems to be "punish-the-critics" week in the theatre. Right on the heels of "Cry of the Peacock" comes "With a Silk Thread," which arrived at the Lyceum last evening. Though both are rather skimpy, brief scripts, they seem interminable in performance. They dish out a terrific beating in a comparatively short running time.

In "With a Silk Thread," Elsa Shelley is concerned with a retired actress married to a difficult, erratic and famous surgeon. Upon graduation from college, their studious son brings home with him for a visit a pal who wants to be an actor. Mama falls in love with the boy, sacrifices any chance she might have of a successful return to the stage to further his career, but eventually returns to papa.

It is difficult to tell just what Miss Shelley intended her characters to be. Their motivations seemed to change with every scene. The doctor was jealous, but did little to make his wife happy. He apparently liked visitors, but not as house guests. The couple appeared to be unable to live with one another, or apart.

The dialogue is shoddy, packed with cliches. It tried the talents of the cast to deliver it, and the patience of the audience to hear it. There were times when it was downright embarrassing, provoking chuckles where none were intended. This was surprising, in view of the calibre of Miss Shelley's work in "Pick-Up Girl," which we remember as a really good play.

Producer Irving Kaye Davis has assembled some first-rate players for "With a Silk Thread," but Miss Shelley, doubling as director, has not employed them to best advantage. Claire Luce, Philip Huston, Phil Arthur, Carole Mathews, William Duff, Mary Mac Leod, Henry Hart and Lilia Skala struggle valiantly with unprofitable material.

It is good to have Miss Luce back with us, after an absence of several years. She, like Huston, has run the gamut in the theatre from popular works to Shakespeare. They deserve better. Miss Mathews is an interesting young actress. We should like to see her in a worthier part.

Watson Barratt has designed a handsome setting — just such a beach house as we should like to have for a Summer vacation. But his lighting is a bit harsh. More ambers and pinks would have helped. Too much white light doesn't show off feminine beauty to advantage. Our better bistro proprietors have discovered that.

"With a Silk Thread" is written in seven scenes. They are short ones. Here is a case of brevity being the soul of mercy rather than of wit.

"WITH A SILK THREAD"

Play by Elsa Shelley; staged by Miss Shelley; setting and costumes by Watson Barratt; presented by Irving Kaye Davis at the Lyceum Theatre, April 12, 1950. The cast:

Anna.....Lilia Skala
Dr. Walter Lucas..Philip Huston
Barry Winters.....Henry Hart
Rose Raymond.....Claire Luce
George Lucas.....William Duff
Tony Fern.....Phil Arthur
Karen Jackson..Carole Mathews
Bucky.....Mary MacLeod

Synopsis: The action of the play is indoors and outdoors of the beachfront residence of the Lucas family. Act I: Scene 1: Early morning—June. Scene 2: The same evening. Scene 3: Ten days later—late afternoon. Act II: Scene 1: That night. Scene 2: Sunday, two weeks later—late afternoon. Scene 3: The next night—midnight. Scene 4: A month later—evening.

Journal American

April 13, 1950

Shelley Plus Shaw Equals Neither

By ROBERT GARLAND

Elsa Shelley, whose successful "Pick Up Girl" was among the official "ten best plays" of 1943-1944, and which, since then, has been internationally reproduced, whose "Foxhole in the Parlor," not as successful during the following season, brought Montgomery Clift to prominence, has "With a Silk Thread" at the Lyceum. But not, I fear, for long!

Taking the title from Juliet's comparison of her beloved Romeo to a "wanton bird," Miss Shelley has again turned her playmaking attention to a contemporary story. But where her first play dealt directly with juvenile delinquency and her second dealt directly with postwar readjustment, her "With a Silk Thread" deals indirectly with—

What does her third play deal with, anyway? I, as a reporter and a non-reporter, am sure that I am one of Elsa Shelley's closer friends. But, as one of those closer friends, I am sure that I have no clear idea what she is getting at in "With a Silk Thread." Except, perhaps, at the rewriting of one of the best of Bernard Shaw.

Rewriting "Candida," to go right down to titles.

In Elsa Shelley's doing over, the Shavian masterpiece becomes a play within Miss Shelley's play. While her Rev. Morrell, who is Dr. Lucas, her Eugene Marchbanks, who is Tony Fern, and her Candida, who is Rose, triangle it by the loud sea waves, Tony and Rose re-triangle it with another on a Summer theatre stage.

Indoors, outdoors, on a private porch of their beachfront home, the American "Candida"-ians—Walter, the doctor whose eyes are shot with green; Rose, whose eyes are prone to wander to a good-looking younger man; Tony, the playboy, whose eyes have not much to learn—are Miss Shelley's shifted Shavians.

Beloved by elder playgoers as the actress Rose Raymond, Mrs. Lucas is fed up with her husband's jumpy jealousy. Returning after a warm day of surgery at the Polyclinic, he puts his green-shot eyes into action. Tony Fern, the Elsa Shelley Marchbanks, is their target. Tony, an actor rather than a poet.

But, as with Bernard Shaw, the happy ending is unhappy!

* * *

Around this borrowed story there are others. The characters, above and below the Lucases, indulge in chit-chat that is not Shavian. Playing with the sand that is more real than anything on the Lyceum's stage, the boys speak unknowingly of love. Then, picking up the girls, they go out of sight to prove it.

Claire Luce, in and out of costumes by Florence Lustig, does the best she can with what she has to do. She even talks to herself on the pretty private porch she has built to get away from her husband and be alone with her insomnia. And her boy friend! When the first-named tries to woo her there, she puts up a wedded-but-no-wife objection.

As Dr. Lucas, Miss Shelley's Rev. Morrell, Philip Huston is as confused as I am as to the play's intentions. Or so he seems! As Tony Fern, Miss Shelley's Eugene Marchbanks, Phil Arthur comes through as a promising and personable young actor. The others, in Watson Barratt's three-sets-in-one, are loyal to the playwright . . .

I did so want to recommend Elsa Shelley's "With a Silk Thread." I can not!

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
April 13, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Tiresome

AN ELOQUENT passage from "Romeo and Juliet" has inspired a singularly unseemly play at the Lyceum Theater. Elsa Shelley's "With a Silk Thread" is vulgar, random and tiresome. Aside from numerous quotations, the script sounds as though it had been fashioned by a novice with a meat ax. The author is no novice, having written such a lola-palooza as "Pick-Up Girl" some years ago, but she knows no more about her trade than a butcher boy. Claire Luce, in the starring role, makes a few attempts to rescue the work, but they are generally unsuccessful.

* * *

She plays the wanton matron with a silk thread, whom Juliet described, with a certain tragic intensity. At times she soliloquizes at considerable length as she becomes infatuated with a young actor, who has been a college chum of her son. Her fate is neither savory nor in any manner satisfying. Since Miss Shelley has her playing Candida to the stripling's Marchbanks in a summer stock company near Manhattan, Shaw is called on for several lines. They are certainly a relief after the drivel that constitutes most of seven scenes.

* * *

The action is laid in a beach resort some seventy miles away from the hospitals where the actress's doctor husband operates. The fellow is certainly on the go in "With a Silk Thread." Philip Huston plays the part with a stiff and quite implausible portrayal of a jealous man. As the young lover, Phil Arthur prances around with a minimum of direction. Carole Mathews, William Duff and Henry Hart are a few of the assisting performers who carry a heavy load. Miss Shelley's staging is as inept as her writing. Watson Barrat has created the setting and costumes, but they do little to brighten a dismal and coarse bit of make-believe.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
April 13, 1950

The Stage Has Another Bad Night

By Richard Watts Jr.

Possibly all of us owe a slight vote of apology to "Cry of the Peacock," which had its unhappy little head bashed in by the reviewers the other evening. It is not that the luckless adaptation from the French was any better than we said it was. It is merely that, compared to Elsa Shelley's "With a Silk Thread," which opened at the Lyceum last night, it seems in retrospect a fairly respectable work of theatrical art.

At least it was trying to do something ambitious. Miss Shelley's drama, on the other hand, seems content to be an endless series of feeble emotional cliches, dealing drearily with an ex-actress who wants to return to the stage, her jealous husband, an amorous young actor, and the carryings-on among the boys and girls of the summer theatre set. There isn't a fresh note in it, nor a scene which doesn't appear to stem from one of those daytime radio serials.

Apparently it is all intended to demonstrate that marriage is here to stay. Anyway, after seven interminable episodes, wherein the disagreeable husband bullies and insults his wife and she has an affair with the young actor, who deserts her, the playwright brings this delightfully mated pair back together for a sentimental and highly domestic ending. I suspect that not even Miss Shelley's heroine deserves such a miserable fate.

Although he is pretty lovable in that final scene, this husband strikes me as easily the most objectionable character of the season. Given the sort of jealousy that makes Othello appear the most complacent of married men, he is such a whining, nasty, bad-mannered and generally obnoxious fellow that her picture of him might seem to suggest that Miss Shelley hates men as venomously as the late August Strindberg loathed women.

Since I have now compared the author of "With a Silk Thread" to Shakespeare and Strindberg, it might be a good idea if I added hastily that it overrates her a bit. Obviously her literary kinship is less to such eminent gentlemen than to the aforementioned writers of the notorious soap operas. It is, in fact, impossible to think of last night's play without thinking, and shuddering a little, about the horrors of the radio. This is hardly the theatre at all.

Claire Luce as the wife and Philip Huston as the husband are completely lost in the dismal proceedings, and Phil Arthur, who once gave a memorable performance in "A Bell for Adano," is helpless as the young lover. Only the handsome Carole Mathews, as a sultry tramp of the summer circuit, manages to give any life to what she is doing, and she disappears fairly early in the play. Maybe I should hint that I don't care for "With a Silk Thread."

New York World-Telegram and The Sun
April 13, 1950

'With a Silk Thread' Opens at Lyceum

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It continues to be a better week in the theater for infidelity than for audiences. "With a Silk Thread" is an obscurely motivated study of an unhappy woman. Its wandering narrative changes points of view as often as one of the longer serials in a slick magazine.

The play starts out being a study of jealously. Soon it turns into a conventional triangle. Then it appears to be a perusal of loneliness. Things end up just as they started with no reason to think conditions are going to be any better for anybody.

Rose Raymond, ex-actress is married to a fine surgeon and has a 19-year-old son just graduated from college. She returns from these ceremonies determined to resume her theatrical career. She has apparently decided on this move to help a friend of her son's, with whom she has fallen in love, to become an actor.

Motivation Is Feeble.

The young man uses her to begin his career, then scorns her after she has left her family for him. Eventually she returns home, where one must assume her absence has made the hearts of her son and husband grow fonder.

This unoriginal tale loses badly by its splashed motivation. The surgeon is psychotically jealous, and sadistically cruel toward his wife. There is no reason to believe she would have stayed with him so many years, or that under the worst circumstances she would return to him.

The love affair with the young man begins obviously enough, but winds up offstage without explanation in character or event.

The play is written in peculiarly specific language. No one just has a drink, but has a "drink of wine." Similarly most statements are preceded with elaborate exposition, until nothing is left to the listener's imagination.

Platitudes Abound.

The play has a tendency to indulge in platitudes. The heroine explains her husband's despicable behavior as being "that of the possessive male." When the visitor calls her Mrs. Lucas, she says, "Miss Raymond, in the theater."

The actress also has a distracting way of carrying on long monologues or asides, which are only explained in part by her belief in interstellar voices that broadcast.

Claire Luce Graceful.

A theatrical cliche that becomes downright wearisome is the trick of constantly removing a character from the stage by having another one tell him to "go get some rest."

Claire Luce is playing the actress who is more harassed than explicable, in a graceful, intense and sometimes inaudible fashion, and Philip Huston makes no attempt to compromise the dastardly traits of her husband.

Phil Arthur is engaging enough in the not very defined role of the ambitious actor.

At Best With Young People.

The author, Elsa Shelley, seems at her best when writing about the younger people. They come out real and sympathetic, and in this case she has admirable assistance from William Duff as the actress' son, and from Mary McLeod and Carole Mathews as two girls working in the local summer theater.

Lilia Skala makes a healthy maid with more charm than her employers.

It is a pity that so much of this play is spent discussing an offstage performance of "Candida," because "With a Silk Thread" will not stand the comparison.

The New York Times

April 13, 1950

Jealousy Is an Awful Thing

By BROOKS ATKINSON

As proof of the fact that life is constantly getting better, take note of the fact that we have not had a play as squalid as "With a Silk Thread" for some time. Elsa Shelley, author of "Pick-up Girl," publicly acknowledges responsibility for the latest crime which was put out in full view of an audience at the Lyceum last evening.

To show that jealousy is a painful experience, Miss Shelley goes into the private life of some profoundly uninteresting people who live expensively by the sea, which incidentally thunders on the beach like a fleet of angry bombers. You may be sure that they are mighty recherché folks—a brilliant surgeon married to a brilliant, psychopathic actress, a graduate of Harvard ('41) and two graduates of Dartmouth ('50). Using odds and ends out of high society and low claptrap, Miss Shelley steeps them in passion for quite a long time.

* * *

No one to impose on willing hands and strong shoulders, Miss Shelley has directed "With a Silk Thread" herself. She has persuaded Claire Luce to play the distraught actress with a constant frown and some smart beach togs. Philip Huston scowls as the husband. Phil Arthur radiates amour as the stronger of the two Dartmouth men. Some other actors, no doubt doing penance for previous sins, find themselves slowly revolving through the purple labyrinth of Miss Shelley's moody analysis of love. Carole Mathews, representing a voracious dame from Idaho, has enough personality and temperament to come through the ordeal unscratched. No doubt she will live to play another part.

It is reported that Miss Shelley has also written a comedy about hoboes entitled "Tomorrow Is a Secret." At least, the locale will be different.

DAILY NEWS

April 13, 1950

'With a Silk Thread' a Slowpoke Marriage Drama at the Lyceum

By JOHN CHAPMAN

With a phrase from Shakespeare for a title and a switch on Bernard Shaw for a plot, Elsa Shelley has written a slow and lugubrious drama about married life, and Miss Shelley's husband, Irving Kaye Davis, produced it last evening at the Lyceum Theatre.

The title is "With a Silk Thread" ("Romeo and Juliet"). The plot seems to stem from "Candida." Suppose, supposes the author, that Candida is not stronger than her husband, and that she does fall in love with the handsome boy, and that the husband—even though he has been a real stinker up to now—turns noble and forgiving.

Well, that's about it—and Miss Shelley tells it in several thousand rather awkwardly chosen words. Claire Luce, an ex-actress, and Philip Huston, a surgeon, have a beach home with real sand around it. A nearby Summer theatre offers Miss Luce a chance to return to the stage for a week.

The Aching Heart.

Since Mr. Huston is very nasty, even for a husband, she takes the opportunity to get away from home and chooses "Candida" as the play. For the role of the boy poet, Marchbanks, she chooses the chum of her son—and they fall in love.

In the seventh and final scene Mr. Huston gets noble and takes Miss Luce and her poor little aching heart back. Which leaves Bernard Shaw right where he always has been, somewhere in London eating boiled greens and counting American greenbacks. It also leaves Mr. and Mrs. Davis stuck with "With a Silk Thread." The actors, who also include Phil Arthur as the boy lover and Carole Mathews and Mary McLeod as a couple of Summer theatre actresses, are pleasant.

"Cry of the Peacock"

New York Post
HOME NEWS

April 12, 1950

A Frenchman Disapproves of Sex

By Richard Watts Jr.

It seems rather a shame that "Cry of the Peacock," which opened at the Mansfield last night, is just about the most inept play of the year, because, with even half a chance, the intense bitterness of its misanthropy might have given it a certain impressiveness. Unfortunately, its medley of accents and acting styles and its general air of hopeless clumsiness provide a combination of dullness and imbecility that is not terribly far from unbearable.

Unless Cecil Robson, its adapter, is deceiving us, which is quite possible, "Cry of the Peacock" reveals the French dramatist, Jean Anouilh, in a mood of frantically savage irony. Love is the particular target of his scorn, and he tells us that this passion, which some of his fellow-countrymen are said to admire, is an abomination and a horror. It is, he believes, the source of all evil and ugliness and must be done away with if life is to be endurable.

Down With Love

With contemptuous loathing, he proclaims that love makes people vile, idiotic, cruel, cheap and fatuous. He has two particular symbols for it; a couple of unpleasant stage children aping its inanities, and a pair of lovesick hunchbacks, whose lustful antics shock the physically normal people who do not see that their own sex activities are equally revolting. Few plays, it must be admitted, have managed to make sex seem so undesirable.

Even the form of the work is ironical. It begins as farce, with a number of presumably comic figures apparently gathered together for the purpose of grotesque comedy. Then, halfway through the proceedings, the mood shifts violently and the spirit becomes one of sardonic tragedy. It is a good trick if a playwright can manage it, but, in the case of "Cry of the Peacock," there is the not-inconsiderable handicap that the farce isn't funny and the tragedy isn't moving.

No Opportunity

As I have suggested, the concentrated violence of the play's misanthropy would have been impressive if given a fraction of opportunity. But "Cry of the Peacock," at least in its current adaptation, is so incompetently managed that the irony and scorn lose all of their bite and become merely juvenile and foolish. In addition, there is a pall of dullness hanging over the evening that transforms it into an epic of tedium.

The players haven't a chance, and it can hardly be said that they show many signs of deserving one. Such experienced performers as Oscar Karlweis, Lili Darvas, Marta Linden, Philip Tonge and Patricia Wheel are hopelessly bogged down, and an English actor named Raymond Lovell is served little better in his local debut. Lucille Patton at least demonstrates some of the sex the cast keeps talking about. "Cry of the Peacock" belongs among the season's disasters.

"CRY OF THE PEACOCK"

Play by Jean Anouilh, adapted by Cecil Robson; staged by Martin Ritt; settings and costumes by Cecil Beaton; presented by James Colligan and Donald Medford at the Mansfield Theatre, April 11, 1950. The cast:

The General...Raymond Lovell
Ada.....Lucille Patton
Nathalie.....Patricia Wheel
Toto.....Clifford Sales
Count.....Oscar Karlweis
Countess.....Marta Linden
Hector de Villardieu.....Philip Tonge
Nicolas.....Peter Brandon
Marie Christine..Mimi Strongin
Tutor.....Richard A. Martin
General's Wife.....Lili Darvas

Synopsis: The entire action of the play takes place in the hall of a French chateau in the year 1912. Act I: Morning. Act II: Afternoon. Act III: Midnight.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

April 12, 1950

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Raucous Love Call

THE delay in the opening of "Cry of the Peacock," at the Mansfield, might better have been permanent. Cecil Robson's adaptation of a French play by Jean Anouilh is a verbose and tasteless consideration of l'amour, with the accent on adultery. Although it has five featured players wandering through a Cecil Beaton setting of a chateau in 1912, it is a fantastic bore. Oscar Karlweis manages to conjure up a bit of feeling and meaning in one scene, when he denounces various members of his family for their well bred desecration of love, Raymond Lovell portrays a staunch old patriarch of a witless clan, and Lili Darvas has a hysterical last-minute entrance as his crazed wife, but the work remains merely embarrassing.

* * *

The theme is as grotesque as it is untidy. Anouilh has imagined a conference of a general's family to discuss ways and means of getting his hunch-backed sister to give up a liaison with a hunch-backed tutor. The latter is seen fleetingly, although he has not got one line to his credit. The misshapen sister remains off-stage. It is still their romance that keys whatever philosophical and moral values are to be found in an ill-advised translation. One by one, various members of a decadent family are dissected, including the lover of an easy-going count and a couple of brats. The net entertainment result is lamentable.

* * *

Martin Ritt, who took over the direction of the piece from Leonora Corbett in the try-out, may have stuck more steadfastly to the original French script than his predecessor, but he has created very little theatrical quality in the production. There is a bitter-sweet romance between Patricia Wheel and Peter Brandon and considerable strutting by Philip Tonge, as a dandy who has his mistress's love for herself to contend with. Marta Linden plays the errant wife acceptably, and Lucille Patton appears occasionally as a comely servant girl.

* * *

It is only Karlweis who is able to pitch a key somewhere between farce and melodrama for a few moments as he makes a long discourse about manners and morals, claiming that the hump on Ardele's back contains more true love than any of his relatives have ever experienced. It is too brief an interlude of dramatic import to give the show more than a tiny lift. The Beaton decor is in his familiar neo-Victorian style.

The New York Times

April 12, 1950

'Cry of the Peacock' Is Adapted From 'Ardele ou la Marguerite' by Jean Anouilh

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since Jean Anouilh is a gifted French playwright, it is hard to understand why "Cry of the Peacock" is so bad. It is Cecil Robson's adaptation of "Ardele ou la Marguerite," and it opened in an opulent production at the Mansfield last evening. For the first half of the evening it looks like a distasteful travesty on the old-fashioned French comedy of l'amour.

But M. Anouilh apparently has more than that in mind. After a sardonic but diffuse first act, "Cry of the Peacock" begins to express a revulsion at the common abuses of love, and the characters that seem so cynical and smug in the first act become pathetic and perhaps tragic as well. Although "Cry of the Peacock" jabbers away at love as though it were unprincipled, it probably derives from a serious and responsible point of view.

* * *

When a gifted playwright appears to be talking gibberish in a foreign language, it is easy to suspect his adapter. Mr. Robson has not made an intelligible drama out of whatever material he may have started with. But it is also possible that M. Anouilh's attitude is not translatable into American. "Cry of the Peacock" rings an endless series of changes on the common noun "love"—making the old people look odious and the young people weak and futile and making worldly civilization look revolting in general. The style is full of abstractions and quibbles. The point of view is contemporaneously French, and proceeds out of a bitter mood induced by bitter national experience.

* * *

The play has been luxuriously produced. In one of his lushest moods Cecil Beaton has designed a baroque château with extravagant furnishings, and he has dressed the characters of the 1912 period with decorously flamboyant costumes. Martin Ritt's direction is a mixture of stylization and candor—the candor being the more useful attitude, on the whole.

The cast includes a number of interesting actors — Oscar Karlweis, as an accomplished philanderer; Raymond Lovell, as an obese victim of love; Marta Linden, as an upper-class termagant; Lili Darvas, as a raging madwoman obsessed with love; Philip Tonge, as a peevish lover of a married woman, and Patricia Wheel and Peter Brandon as refreshingly attractive representatives of youth.

In view of the many theatre processes involved in an adaptation, it is impossible to tell from one look at "Cry of the Peacock" why the total impression is so inept and muddled. Very likely the play is not so bad as it appears to be.

Journal American

April 12, 1950

An Unpleasant Play, Too Bad to Be True

By ROBERT GARLAND

In his French-to-English adaptation of Jean Anouilh's "Ardele ou la Marguerite," Cecil Robson ignores what must have been an almost irresistible temptation to call last night's show up at the Mansfield "Love Is a Four-Letter Word." Instead, he calls it "Cry of the Peacock." This, when you see the play, means the same thing.

In his over-effort to prove M. Anouilh's pessimistic point, Mr. Robson's "Cry of the Peacock" runs the gamut of sexuous denunciation from Juvenal to Philip Wylie and back to H. L. Mencken. Even the kiddies, prattling of mama and papa in their hedgerow games, make mud-pies of the earthy urge which is said to make the world go 'round.

For reasons known to themselves, James Colligan and Donald Medford have gone all out with their production of "Ardele ou la Marguerite." Especially with eye-filling "decor" with fifty-seven varieties of paintings hanging on it, two curving stairways and a balcony from which to denounce the so-called human race.

This "decor," handsome enough on its own, plus one-half the lighting, are "Cry of the Peacock's" boon from Cecil Beaton. His is the piece's outstanding attribution.

* * *

Why Bird Cries

May I tell you why the peacock's crying, but not for long, on 47th Street? Well, The General, easily mistaken for Sir Francis Beekman in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," has a bedded wife upstairs who, whenever the conversation grows dull in the salon below, gives out with peacockish cries. This is all too often.

In the salon below, everybody —but everybody — is married to one person and keeping company with another. Yet they're shocked when a hump-back takes another hump-back as a lover. The kiddies, Mimi and Toto, are like their elders. But they're cramped in style, having no third kiddie to whom to be untrue.

Even against Mr. Beaton's handsome enough "decor," "Cry of the Peacock" couldn't be more unpleasant, unsavory, uninteresting and uncalled-for if it tried. And, last night, I frequently thought it did try! The alleged smartness of its adulterers adds no little to its overall unwelcome. Frankly, it's too bad to be true . . .

With so much unfaithfulness around, I wonder if, as author of "Cry of the Peacock," Cecil Robson has been true to Jean Anouilh as author of "Ardele ou la Marguerite."

* * *

Accents Confuse

Having found its way from French to English, the Frenchman's play now finds its way into several brands of broken English. Oscar Karlweis as A Count and Lili Darvas as The General's Wife speak English a la Austria. Peter Brandon as Nicolas speaks English a la Germany. Off-stage noises as The Peacock——

Mr. Karlweis, first of the featured players, may not be able to speak English at all if he remains over here much longer. Miss Darvas is not much more intelligible. Hers is the "big scene" of the importation and she dialects it disasterously. Peter Brandon's accented Nicholas is not as essential as the others.

But I don't believe that "Cry of the Peacock" would be a whole lot better entirely in the voices of Raymond Lovell, who is English, Marta Linden, who is American, Philip Tonge, who is English-American, and the unaccented others. I don't believe that last night's new arrival would have been worse with its original director . . .

You should have seen me listening last night to what the off-stage peacock, in opposition to The General's Wife, was crying. It was "No! No! No!" I think, although it, too, had a confusing accent.